



In Iowa's Interest:

Black History Month a Time to Reflect and Look Forward

by Senator Tom Harkin

February is Black History Month, the time of year we pause to commemorate the great achievements and contributions made by African Americans over the years. Key among these are the historic triumph over slavery and the monumental victories over injustice that were won during the Civil Rights Movement. Our country is rooted in the freedom of all peoples and we must pay tribute to the times in history when we overcame the greatest obstacles on the path to liberty and justice for all.

This year, the theme of Black History Month is "African Americans and the Civil War." The Civil War was a bitter time that tore America apart, but it also was an opportunity for African Americans to stand up and fight for their right to live freely. Tens of thousands of African American soldiers gave their lives for the freedom of all slaves, even if they could never be free themselves. Their heroic actions paved the way for future generations to live in a free country, to prosper, and to create even more possibilities for their children to achieve success.

Some of the greatest African American thinkers and leaders have their roots in Iowa, such as George Washington Carver. Undoubtedly, he is most famous for his advances in agricultural science and was a prolific scholar and inventor. He began his higher education at Simpson College and later he transferred to Iowa State College, now Iowa State University, where he received both his bachelor's and master's degree in agricultural science. After graduation, he was hired at the school to teach in his field of study, and here he began his career advancing agriculture in our state and across the nation.

Iowa has always been at the forefront when it comes to civil rights in education, not only with admissions but also with student life. Iowa State University, Drake University, and the University of Iowa all introduced desegregated dormitories in 1946, years ahead of many other institutions across the nation.

We also have a long history of establishing equal rights for everyone. Looking back, it was over 170 years ago that the Iowa Supreme Court denounced slavery in 1839 – the first decision made by the high court. Iowa has been determined to pursue a fair and just society for all races. We must remember and honor the past and look optimistically towards the future, which can only hold more opportunities for further unity and liberty.